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Office of the Mayor

Mayor Jenny A. Durkan

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Transcript: Mayor Durkan's Remarks at Sunday, June 7 Press Conference

by [Kelsey Nyland](#) on June 7, 2020

Seattle (June 7, 2020) – Today, Mayor Durkan [held a press conference](#) with Chief of Police Carmen Best to provide an update on recent demonstrations and policy and operational changes at the Seattle Police Department. The Mayor's remarks as delivered are below:

Good evening and thank you for joining us today.

I also want to remember we are here not just because of the murder of George Floyd but because of the light it has shown once again on the generational impacts of systemic racism.

While we are witnessing, sharing, and experiencing more pain than any time I can remember, there is also reason to hope.

People are rising in cities across our nation to speak out, to protest and to demand change.

Today's "We Want to Live" march in Othello for Black Lives saw thousands of people march to end violence and systemic racism.

Thousands are still there now, building community, peacefully protesting, and calling for an end to police violence and the systemic structures that perpetuate it.

I am grateful for all those who peacefully marched and protested in Othello, and throughout our City, today and every day. By the thousands, we have seen people march in almost every part of town.

This has been an incredibly painful week for our City and our country. One that is shining the light yet again on hundreds of years of racism and injustice that has haunted our past and continues to our present.

It is a moment that summons all of us – including me – to do more and to do better.

Pain and anguish have brought out thousands of our neighbors to protest and demand action. They must be heard. We must act. And we are.

This last week I have had many conversations with members of the Black community and communities of color about how we go forward as a city.

The Black community wants their voice centered.

While painful, because the trauma and impacts of systemic racism are both immediate and generations deep – I have deeply appreciated those conversations and their willingness to have them.

I believe we truly can as one person said to me, build true, lasting generational justice and change.

Today I was honored to join a number of African American leaders, Executive Constantine, and Seattle King County Public Health Director – Patty Hayes to see how we can address systemic racism as a public health crisis – that affects every aspect of a Black Americans life.

A brilliant doctor noted that the black community is experiencing two pandemics. COVID-19 and generations of racism.

We need to bring the same intensity and make the same commitment to cure the illness of racism that we have brought to COVID-19.

Tonight, I want to talk about some of the concrete steps we are taking as a result of those conversations we have had, and I have pledged to continue that dialogue and lead the city as a partner in generational change.

But first I do want to briefly address what has happened on Capitol Hill this week, and particularly last night.

I know that Chief Best addressed this earlier today, and those topics and will say more on the tactics and operations at the East Precinct as the night continues.

I want to again thank Chief Best for her leadership through this unprecedented time. What she and officers do for our City is remarkable, but she also knows she will admit faults, and take actions to continuously improve her police department.

Yesterday, we saw an all too familiar pattern: Demonstrations outside the East Precinct remained peaceful for hours – until the situation devolved in the late afternoon and in the evening.

Since last Saturday, Chief Best and I have talked multiple times a day about reducing the tension, de-escalating and de-militarizing the posture, and removing the barriers Downtown and on Capitol Hill.

Each day, she and SPD have changed tactics and operations to adjust.

As I said on Tuesday, use of force must be rare, it must be necessary, and it must be proportional.

And like everyone in our community, we know that was not been in the case – not only this week – but in many cases before.

Based on the best assessment of Chief Best, in part because of specific information from the FBI about threats to the East Precincts and buildings in Seattle, they concluded that removing the barrier would jeopardize the safety of the public and the community, especially considering there are approximately 500 residents that live in that block.

From briefings with the Chief, I was informed that some demonstrators last night were pushing against and moving the barricade forward and some were throwing projectiles. Several officers were injured.

While that is counter to being peaceful, SPD's response needed to be better measured.

While the accountability system will review all of the facts, the response seem too quick to escalate. Too quick to deploy of flash bangs, pepper spray and deployment of the National Guard.

While officers have been working long hours under difficult conditions, de-escalation should be the number one priority for the department – and the deployment of flash bangs before using every tool to deescalate – that is what we have to do to reflect the commitment of SPD.

De-escalation is critical in every interaction officers have – from individual actions to crowd management.

Particularly now at this time in our country, when it feels like the national politics slides even further towards a despot, our local government must be different. We serve the people.

Our policing must reflect this.

I want to be clear with you – as I have with the Chief – what my expectations are for the police department.

These aren't just my expectations.

They are the expectations of our community and, frankly, the expectations and core values that should be embedded in SPD's policies and officers' training. Most importantly, I know they are also the core values of Chief Best.

As U.S. Attorney, I investigated SPD ten years ago because of the unconstitutional use of force.

And as Mayor, it is now my job to Seattle Police Department to make sure it is committed to a culture of continuous and transparent reforms.

My commitment has never been deeper to reforming the department because mayors come and go.

But cultural reform is what is most enduring.

We have an actual opportunity to build on the lasting systemic changes that can transform policing and the department.

SPD must be a department that leads with de-escalation and does not use force unless it is absolutely necessary.

They have changed so much in the last ten years, particularly as we have seen this week with crowd management.

A critical component for accountability at SPD is the Office of Police Accountability which investigates individual actions against officers, Office of Inspector General which looks at systems and the Community Police Commissions which engages community.

These accountability systems can work – this week, OPA, OIG, and CPC expedited the review and with public health recommended against using tear gas – leading to Chief Best's order.

I also have to be held accountable, and I must hold Chief Best and the Department accountable.

I know that not every decision I make is always the right one, and my actions should be scrutinized also.

The actions both Chief Best and I have taken been for the interest of Seattle.

From canceling the curfew, to suspending the use of tear gas, to ending the mourning band policy, were the right decisions. We acted in days, but we should have acted sooner.

Capitol Hill is a very special place for me. It is where I went when I first came out; it is where I both saw horrendous acts of hate and where the LGBTQ community carved out a place of safety.

I know that safety was shattered for many by images, sounds and gas more fitting of a war zone: I am sorry.

To all those who came peacefully and had their constitutional right to protest impacted: I am sorry.

To those who have felt their voices and message drowned out by the small fraction of individuals seemingly intent on inciting violence between police and peaceful demonstrators: I am sorry.

At the City, both Chief Best and I are listening and acting to the tens of thousands of our community members who have taken to the streets to call for a better city and a better country

I do not pretend to have all the answers, but I am so grateful for the opportunity to learn, and grow, and to be held accountable.

I also want to take the opportunity to thank those in the community who helped de-escalate many of the moments of tension.

It gives me hope.

And as Chief Best discussed earlier today and this evening, she is making operational adjustments at the East Precinct. Our city should not look like a military zone. But they also have to respond to the reality on the ground to keep the officers and public safe.

We will see things change every night. You cannot predict everything, but what you can do is have the training to know that your job is to not escalate.

Chief Best and I have agreed to reduce the National Guard presence and that the use of riot gear should be curtailed.

The help of those on frontline to maintain the peace is instrumental in ensuring everyone remains safe. I ask that demonstration participants who observe unsafe behavior please hold those folks accountable.

I've had conversations with a number of people who were protesting that felt that they were not safe and that their voice couldn't be heard because of other people on their side of the barricade.

Our shared goals to keep everyone safe. We also have an obligation at this time to not let the message, not let the narrative of why we are here be drowned out.

I want to again center our discussion and remember and honor George Floyd, who was murdered by police officers in Minneapolis.

And whose unjust killing jumpstarted this national reckoning with police violence and systemic racism.

But George Floyd's murder is not the only reason tens of thousands of Seattle residents are taking to the streets each day.

Here in Seattle, people are protesting a culture of systemic racism and police actions that exists right in our backyard.

There have been black and brown people killed by police here in Seattle. John T. Williams, Che Taylor, Charleena Lyles and so many more. Their lives have been cut short because of an interaction with the police that serve us.

Those killings remind us of the profound injustice of how they were failed by the city and the system. In Seattle we have to do so much more.

And our communities are also protesting the City's management of the demonstrations.

They're protesting a culture that can use force before de-escalation, and they're protesting a government and a culture that perpetuates systemic inequities that impact people of color, particularly Black Americans.

People are rightfully protesting how we can be better as a City and make real changes.

I want to talk about what we have been able to do and the conversations that we have had.

Yesterday, I met with Black Lives Matter – Seattle & King County and the Urban League, and over the last several days, I've met with several other community groups, including protest organizers, the Community Police Commission, faith leaders, and others.

We've discussed how to move forward and address the systemic inequities in our City.

We've agreed on many issues, including short-term and long-term actions the City can take to dismantle inequity and build a better future for Black Americans, Indigenous people, and communities of color.

By doing that, we build a better city for everyone.

First, I said SPD was ready to turn on the body cameras. I believe we can make that step now instead of waiting for a final recommendations.

I will issue an Emergency Order tomorrow and send it to the City Council requiring that officers have their body cams turned on to record during the demonstrations. I have heard that public trust and confidence is broken, and people want the body cams on to provide additional accountability.

I understand the issue has complex privacy issues that many have spent time addressing.

To create a policy that truly lasts and won't be dismantled by a lawsuit, my office is ready to work with the CPC, City Council, OPA and experts like the ACLU and Public Defenders Association to revise policies on the use of body cameras during lawful events like a peaceful protest.

We want to make sure that we have accountability, but we also let people exercise their first amendment rights without government surveillance.

Until they give those recommendations, we will also work with the City Attorney's office to protect all data collected from being used improperly.

We must find a solution that ensures officer accountability while not improperly surveilling our communities.

Second, the Chief issued a directive to all her officers calling on them to remove their mourning band and ensure their badge number was visible to the public.

This seems simple but there has been reports that officers are continuing to wear black tape over their badge numbers. This is a violation of policy and will be investigated by the Office of Police Accountability. Any officer violating the policy will be held accountable.

Third, City Attorney Pete Holmes has withdrawn the City's filing to end the sustainment period under the Consent Decree, so that we can go back to the Court after evaluating the SPD's response to the demonstrations. And basing that on deep engagement and reflections of OPA, OIG, CPC, and the community voice.

Fourth, we've asked our civilian independent police accountability partners – OPA, OIG, and CPC – as well as the DOJ and federal monitor to examine all of the current Seattle Police policies for crowd management. This includes evaluating recent events, and the need or the failure to de-escalate.

Over the next 30 days, they are reviewing whether to permanently ban tear gas and make any other recommendations to de-escalate or use less lethal crowd management tools.

If they need more time, it will be extended.

Fifth, the Seattle Police Department will be updating their policies this week to succinctly, and clearly, reflect best practices for the use of force concerns we have heard from the community – related to the 2016 Campaign Zero national policy survey.

This includes the City's current ban on chokeholds, firing a weapon at a moving vehicle, and exhausting all other options before using force. This will further restrict the use of excessive and deadly force.

Sixth, as I said Friday, I believe there should be an independent prosecutor at the state level for investigation and prosecutions of any police officers or other state actor who commits deadly force.

This is in addition to the investigations conducted currently through I-940 and our accountability system.

Seventh, I'm having conversations with Chief Best and the Governor about scaling back the presence of the U.S. National Guard and reassigning some of them to continue assisting the City's food security efforts related to the impact of COVID-19 on our community.

I am very grateful for their service, and but Seattle wants to soon see the day where we do not have soldiers on our streets.

Eighth, protesting and demonstrating are not crimes, and I have been clear from the outset that no one should be arrested or have charges filed against them for peacefully protesting or for violating the temporary curfew when we had it imposed. City and county prosecutors can ensure this is the case.

I want to talk a little bit about our budget process.

These advances alone still do not address the systemic barriers that pervade our society.

Our collective failure to address racism and inequality isn't just in the area of policing in America. It is in housing. And health. And education. And economic opportunity.

We are going to be even more intentional in investments that will make a difference in the lives of people of color in our city, support resilient communities, and undue systemic and structural racism.

This work must be and will be guided by the community.

True public safety doesn't just come from police and police reform.

True public safety means that everyone, regardless of their background, has the opportunity to build a better life without fear for themselves and their loved ones and has access to the services they need. Healthcare. Affordable housing. Education. Jobs.

Over the last two years, we've created programs like Seattle Promise, Orca Opportunity, and Seattle Promise Job and Career Pathways to help Seattle's young people, and in particular young people of color, reach their full potential. We've built more affordable housing than ever before. But more must be done.

To do that, we need to adjust our priorities here in the City of Seattle. And we need to do that with our dollars.

There are broad calls to defund police departments and invest in community.

It is reflective of our deep problem that the governmental system has in which we invest – this system that touches the black community the most – is our criminal justice system.

We need to change that.

We will examine SPD's budget, and in addition to the partnership with Chief Best and the leaders of the community, really have a community driven voice in that budgeting.

For example, Black Lives Matter Seattle and King County recommended a Commission – the creation of a new commission – to center black voices in city decision-making and investments. There are existing City advisory groups including the Our Best Council, the African American Community Advisory Council to the Seattle Police Department, and the Mayor's Council on African American Elders.

But I agree that we should create a new Commission, crafted by and directed by community that focuses on increasing the health, wealth, safety, and prosperity of our black residents.

We need to change how we think of policing. In so many circumstances when people call 911 – they do not need someone with a gun to show up. We need to add to programs like our civilian Community Services Officers, our Crisis Intervention Team, and the Community Policing Bureau. These strategies have been successful in engaging and connecting SPD with community.

In the coming weeks we'll have more to share about how we are going to do budgeting in this year's SPD budget.

But we will start by holding off planned expenditures in technology, weapons, vehicles, and facilities.

We should not continue with spending that was planned under our "old" police budget, until we have developed a plan with community for a "new" police budget.

During the pandemic, I know we have to rethink all of our priorities in the budget, so I will be working with my cabinet, including Chief Best, to determine what we will do for the 2021 budget, which I propose in just three months.

As part of recent conversations, I've committed to identifying at least \$100 million to invest communities we have neglected for far too long, including new community-based and community-driven programs that invest in black youth and adults, employment programs, black owned businesses and providing alternatives to arrest and incarceration.

What is so abundantly clear is that the way we have structured American society is not working.

In 2020, we are not only facing a nationwide reckoning with systemic racism and police violence, but: There is a global pandemic that is exposing the vast gaps in our current health care system; climate change continues to be ever-present and a growing crisis impacting communities of color disproportionately; the wealth disparity between white and Black Americans continues to widen; and corporations grow wealthier and more powerful while failing to give adequate protections to their workers and putting small, family-owned businesses under.

We are at an inflection point in our country's history.

I have always believed that Seattle leads the way in showing how to build a better, more progressive future.

I am committed to ensuring Seattle shows the rest of the country how to make real, lasting investments in communities of color, especially for our black community.

I know we are up to the task. It won't be easy. It will take all of us together, but I believe we can do it.

Thank you very much

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